

INFORMATION REPORT

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SUPPLEMENT TO
REPORT NO.

COUNTRY Indochina

SUBJECT Opinions of Inhabitant of a Tonkin Village
on Viet Minh and French Occupation

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1. At the outset of the Viet Minh occupation, the population was decidedly anti-Viet Minh, because of the complete isolation of the village and the cutting off of exterior commerce. A blockade was imposed, which even prohibited traffic with Nam Dinh. The Viet Minh placed heavy emphasis on industrial self-sufficiency. Only the absolute necessities were to be imported, and the people were even expected to make their own clothing. Complete self-reliance was envisaged after the industrialization of the country, when there would be no further need for importation of any kind. There was no attempt under the Viet Minh, however, to put into effect the much discussed land reform.
2. Because of the essential poverty of the country, the Viet Minh emphasized the necessity for outside aid until such time as the Vietnamese could become self-sufficient. It was on this basis that they persuaded the people to cooperate with the Chinese. The Viet Minh explained this alliance with the Chinese by saying that the latter would remain only until they had helped the Vietnamese to become established.*
3. While at the beginning of the occupation, Viet Minh propaganda was aimed at the nationalist aspirations of the Vietnamese, Communist propaganda increased steadily. The greatest advantage afforded the population during the Viet Minh occupation was the opportunity for both old and young to learn to read. The Viet Minh published a newspaper, and books on Communism

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and Communist theory were available in all the stores. No book on the United States or the other capitalist countries was allowed in the village. During the six months of French occupation, no local newspaper has been published, and even newspapers from Hanoi are prohibited.

4. Most of the inhabitants of the village had never heard the name of the Commander-in-Chief of the Viet Minh Army, Vo Nguyen Giap; and the intellectuals regard him as a "Communist promoter." Ho Chi Minh, on the other hand, remains a national hero to everyone, and is still the great selling point of the Viet Minh.
5. During the occupation, the Viet Minh disturbed only those villagers who were actively opposed to Ho Chi Minh. Although the population included a good many Catholics, who were especially anti-Viet Minh, Viet Minh troops were always correct in their behaviour. The occupation was in no sense a "reign of terror"; there was no double taxation, by both the Viet Minh and the Vietnamese, and the taxes were just. Taxes were imposed primarily on businesses, especially rice producers, and not on the land. The Viet Minh carried out rice raids from time to time, but the people were always paid for the rice taken. Although they were paid only 75 percent of the market price for rice, the people seemed to be impressed by the fact that they were always asked for the rice and paid for it. The Viet Minh explained that the rice was taken for the cause of independence, and the people were convinced that the Viet Minh worked for their welfare.
6. There were two French raids on the village during the Viet Minh occupation, one a year and a half ago, and the other six months later. Although thirty Viet Minh guerrillas worked as farmers in the village, the Vietnamese refused to identify any of them to the French, because of fear of reprisal, but primarily because of their dislike of the French.
7. The French burned the village in the course of the second raid, and made prisoners of ten of the villagers, none of them Viet Minh. The prisoners were released three months later, and the French finally occupied the village in April 1950, with a force which included no Vietnamese troops. The behaviour of the French troops, raping and looting the villagers, convinced the people of the superiority of life under the Viet Minh.
8. The French insisted that the leading citizens of the village elect "chiefs", who were to maintain liaison between the French and the people. The "chiefs", usually chosen from among the leading citizens themselves, lived in constant fear of Viet Minh reprisal.
9. Under the French, the home industry idea was discontinued, and the Viet Minh attempt to increase local industry was discontinued, and commerce was resumed to some extent. Commerce was to a great extent controlled by the Chinese, however, who brought goods in from Hanoi, and forced many of the villagers out of work. While under the Viet Minh, the villagers lacked certain things, notably medicines and European style dress, rice was 25 percent cheaper than under French control, and life was considerably less tense.

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* Comment. It is widespread belief among the Vietnamese that the Chinese will remain only until they have aided the Vietnamese to expel the French from Viet Nam.

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** Comment. The Viet Minh paid 3,000 Ho Chi Minh piasters for rice, when the market price was 4,000 piasters. At that time, 10 Ho Chi Minh piasters were equivalent to 1 Indochinese piaster.

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*** Comment. This is at variance with other information regarding the behaviour of French troops, and is indicative of the success of Viet Minh propaganda in occupied villages.

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